

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7021

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 01870

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DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY AND INFO ADDRESSEES IN REFTEL

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDF-3

TAGS: PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION

REF: (A) STATE 01318 (B) STATE 013817

SUMMARY: I DISCUSSED LEBANON WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SAUVAGNARGUES TUESDAY NIGHT. HE AND GISCARD ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DETERIORATING SITUATION. WITHIN PAST FEW DAYS, FRANCE HAS EXPLORED POSSIBILITY OF SECURITY COUNCIL INITIATIVE, BUT WAS DISCOURAGED BY LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. FRENCH HAVE ALSO BEEN INFORMED THAT ASSAD OF SYRIA AND FRANGIE ARE NEGOTIATING AGAIN, AND SYRIANS SAY THAT FRANGIE IS NOW FAVORABLE TO PROPOSALS SIMILAR TO THOSE HE REJECTED DECEMBER 3L. IF THIS SECOND SYRIAN INITIATIVE FAILS, AND ALL PARTIES AGREE, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID IT IS NOT EXCLUDED THAT FRANCE MIGHT TRY AGAIN. BUT SAUVAGNARGUES FINDING IT VERY DIFFICULT TO COME UP WITH WORKABLE OPTION. END SUMMARY.

1. SAUVAGNARGUES RECEIVED ME LATE TUESDAY NIGHT SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN FROM AN ALL-DAY EC-9 FOREIGN

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MINISTERS MEETING IN LUXEMBOURG.

2. SAUVAGNARGUES AGREED WITH OUR ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION AS SUMMARIZED REFTTEL (B). GOF CONCURS THAT CONFLICT HAS BADLY DETERIORATED IN PAST TWO WEEKS, DUE MAINLY TO EFFORT BY CHRISTIANS TO BRING ABOUT DE FACTO MILITARY PARTITION. I THEREFORE CONCENTRATED ON TRANSMITTING POINTS CONTAINED REFTTEL (A), STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY ACTION TO BRING ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO ALL ELEMENTS IN LEBANON. I EXPLAINED WHY IT WOULD BE TACTICALLY UNWISE FOR THE U.S. TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ANY NEW INITIATIVE, AND EXPRESSED OUR VIEW THAT FOR HISTORICAL AND POLICY REASONS, FRANCE IS IN BEST POSITION TO WIN CONFIDENCE OF BOTH MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS. I TOLD SAUVAGNARGUES THAT MAJOR FRENCH INITIATIVE COULD COUNT ON U.S. SUPPORT, WORKING THROUGH ISRAELIS, SAUDIS AND EGYPTIANS AND OTHERS AS REQUIRED.

3. SAUVAGNARGUES REPLIED THAT HE AND GISCARD HAVE BEEN AGONIZING OVER LEBANESE CRISIS FOR THE PAST TEN DAYS, FEELING THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE, BUT UNABLE TO COME UP WITH A REALLY VIABLE FORMULA. ON JANUARY 17, SAUVAGNARGUES STARTED EXPLORING POSSIBLE SECURITY COUNCIL INITIATIVE. MESSAGES WERE SENT TO KARAMI AND FRANGIE. KARAMI WAS IN PROCESS OF RE-SIGNING, AND WAS THEREFORE NOT IN A POSITION TO COMMENT. FRANGIE WAS TOTALLY NEGATIVE ABOUT FRENCH PROPOSAL, ARGUING THAT PROBLEM CONTINUES TO BE STRICTLY AN INTERNAL MATTER. LEBANESE FOREIGN MINISTER SUGGESTED FRENCH, U.S., SOVIET TRIPARTITE MEDIATION, BUT GOF REJECTED THIS AS TOTALLY UNREALISTIC.

4. AFTER FURTHER INTERNAL DEBATE, SAUVAGNARGUES DECIDED JANUARY 19 TO SUGGEST THAT SAUDIS AND EGYPTIANS RAISE MATTER IN SECURITY COUNCIL. THIS IDEA WAS TRIED OUT ON SYRIANS WHO RESPONDED NEGATIVELY IN CABLE FROM DAMASCUS JANUARY 20. SYRIANS EXPLAINED THAT ASAD AND FRANGIE ARE IN DIRECT COMMUNICATION ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION, AND THAT FRANGIE APPEARS TO BE ON VERGE OF ACCEPTING PROPOSALS SIMILAR TO
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THOSE HE AND CHAMOUN REJECTED LAST DECEMBER 31. SAUVAGNARGUES QUICKLY POINTED OUT THAT SYRIANS ARE SAYING THIS, AND CONFIRMATION FROM FRANGIE IS STILL PENDING.

5. ACCORDING TO GOF REPORT FROM DAMASCUS, NEW ASAD PROPOSAL CALLS FOR EQUALITY OF SEATS IN ASSEMBLY, WITH PRESIDENT ELECTED BY ASSEMBLY AND ALL FORMER

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PRESIDENTS SITTING TOGETHER. THIS WOULD ASSURE ELECTION OF CHRISTIAN PRESIDENT. THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE ELECTED BY THE ASSEMBLY SITTING ALONE, WHICH WOULD ASSURE ELECTION OF MOSLEM PRIME MINISTER. THE TWO PLO AGREEMENTS WOULD BE MAINTAINED, AND A DE FACTO CEASE FIRE WOULD BE AGREED WITHOUT ANY ANNOUNCEMENT BEING MADE.

6. SAUVAGNARGUES SAID THAT ON BASIS OF THIS LATEST REPORT ABOUT ASAD-FRANGIE NEGOTIATIONS, HE IS INCLINED TO PROBE FURTHER TO DETERMINE HOW REAL THIS NEW MEDIATION EFFORT IS BEFORE CONSIDERING ANY POSSIBLE FRENCH INITIATIVE. IN ANY EVENT, GOF COULD NOT PROCEED WITHOUT AGREEMENT OF SYRIANS WHO ARE NOT LIKELY TO APPROVE ANY FRENCH ACTION UNTIL CURRENT EFFORT IS TOTALLY EXHAUSTED. THE NEXT STEP, THEREFORE, IS TO CHECK WITH FRANGIE AND ASAD TO FIND OUT WHAT IS GOING ON.

7. AS A MATTER OF POLICY, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID HE AND GISCARD ARE AGREED THAT IF LEBANESE SITUATION DETERIORATES TO THE WORST POINT, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST STEP IN TO MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY OF THE COUNTRY. HIS ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, IS THAT A BREAK-UP OF THE COUNTRY IS NOT LIKELY BECAUSE BOTH SYRIA AND ISRAEL ARE OPPOSED TO THIS HAPPENING. HE EXPECTS,

THEREFORE, THAT SITUATION WILL CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE
INTERNALLY WITH NO SOLID BASIS DEVELOPING FOR OUTSIDE
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INTERVENTION. THERE IS HEAVY FRENCH PUBLIC PRESSURE
FOR INTERVENTION, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID, BUT HE CANNOT
ENVISAGE STEPPING IN WITHOUT ALIENATING EITHER OR
BOTH SIDES. THE CHRISTIANS INTERPRET FRENCH INTER-
VENTION AS PROVIDING PROTECTION AGAINST THE MOSLEMS.
THE MODERATE ARABS INTERPRET FRENCH INTERVENTION AS
PROVIDING PROTECTION AGAINST THE PLO. I ARGUED THAT
WAITING UNTIL THE SITUATION DETERIORATES TO ITS
WORST POINT MEANS WAITING UNTIL THE SITUATION IS
PROBABLY BEYOND REDEMPTION.

8. SUMMING UP, SAUVAGNARGUES SAID THAT WE MUST FIRST
DETERMINE IF THERE IS ANY CHANCE FOR INTERNAL AGREEMENT
UNDER SYRIAN AUSPICES. IF THE CURRENT SYRIAN EFFORT
FAILS, AND IF THERE IS SOLID U.S. AND ARAB BACKING,
A FRENCH INITIATIVE CANNOT BE EXCLUDED. BECAUSE OF
THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE SITUATION, AND BECAUSE OF
THE HISTORY OF THE COUVE DE MURVILLE MISSION, IT MIGHT
BE BETTER FOR FRANCE TO CHAIR A SMALL MULTILATERAL
EFFORT (THREE OR FOUR COUNTRIES) RATHER THAN ACT
ALONE, BUT THIS IS SOMETHING FOR FURTHER REFLECTION.
THE KEY COUNTRY REMAINS SYRIA WHOSE COOPERATION AND
APPROVAL ARE A PREREQUISITE. FINALLY, THE CORE PROBLEM
IS TO FIND A FORMULA THAT CAN WORK. NOTHING THOUGHT
OF SO FAR HAS HAD THE VIRTUE OF GIVING THE CHRISTIANS
A FEELING OF SECURITY WHICH THEY ARE SEEKING IN
PARTITION, OR IN SUCH A BADLY DETERIORATED SITUATION
THAT THE U.S. WOULD BE FORCED TO INTERVENE MILITARY,
A COMPLETELY UNREALISTIC HOPE. I AGAIN STRESSED THE
NEED TO TAKE A DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE NOW TO PREVENT
THE SITUATION FROM DETERIORATING BEYOND THE POINT OF
NO RETURN, AND THAT FRANCE IS THE MOST QUALIFIED
GOVERNMENT TO TAKE THAT INITIATIVE.

9. SAUVAGNARGUES SAID HE WOULD TRY TO CONVEY THE
MESSAGE TO GISCARD ON WEDNESDAY, AND THAT HE LOOKED
FORWARD TO DISCUSSING THIS FURTHER WITH THE SECRETARY
IN BRUSSELS AT THE END OF THE WEEK. HE AGREED THAT
FOR THE TIME BEING, THIS DISCUSSION SHOULD BE CONFINED
TO BILATERAL CHANNEL.

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